

UNITED STATES PATENT APPLICATION
FOR
SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR AUTOMATED SWITCHING OF DATA
TRAFFIC IN A PACKET NETWORK

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"Express Mail" mailing label number EL234216050US

Date of Deposit June 1, 2000

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09526662-060100

SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR AUTOMATED SWITCHING OF DATA TRAFFIC IN A PACKET NETWORK

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

5 The present invention relates generally to telecommunication systems and, more particularly, to a system and method for automated switching of data traffic in a packet network.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

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10 ATM is a switching and multiplexing technique designed for transmitting digital information, such as data, video, and voice, at high speed, with low delay, over a telecommunications network. The ATM network includes a number of switching nodes coupled through communication links. In the ATM network, bandwidth capacity is allocated to fixed-sized units named "cells." The communication links transport the cells from a switching
15 node to another. These communication links can support many virtual connections, also named channels, between the switching nodes. The virtual connections, for example a Virtual Channel Connection (VCC) or a Permanent Virtual Circuit (PVC), assure the flow and delivery of information contained in the cells.

20 The ATM Forum, which is a user and vendor group establishing ATM standards, has also defined several ATM service categories, used in characterization of a virtual connection. For example, among such service

categories are (1) a Constant Bit Rate (CBR), which supports a constant or guaranteed rate to transport services, such as video or voice, as well as circuit emulation, which requires rigorous timing control and performance parameters; (2) a Variable Bit Rate (VBR), real time and non real time, which supports variable bit rate data traffic with average and peak traffic parameters; (3) an Available Bit Rate (ABR), which supports feedback to control the source rate in response to changed characteristics in the network; and (4) an Unspecified Bit Rate (UBR).

Figure 1a illustrates a prior art packet network 100, typically including several network nodes, also known as switching nodes, 110 connected through single communication links 120. The packet network 100 is a data transmission network with guaranteed bandwidth and quality of service. Typically, end users 130 access the network 100 and connect to the nodes 110 via similar links 120. Generally, the illustrated communication links 120 carry traffic from many sources to many destinations and may support multiple virtual connections. Although these virtual connections may be statistically multiplexed onto the same link, the network 100 must still meet certain quality of service requirements for each connection.

A failure within the network 100 will interrupt the flow of data from a source end user to a destination end user. When the flow of data is interrupted for a longer period of time, typically for a period longer than 250 milliseconds, some voice communications, such as voice calls, carried by the network will be

dropped. In order to improve the reliability of networks, several systems have been designed to eliminate such extended data interruptions.

One such system is an automatic protection switching (APS) system. As illustrated in Figure 1b, in the packet network 100, parallel links 122, 124

5 connect the nodes 110 and are used to transmit duplicate information between the nodes 110 and to ensure fast and reliable data transmission. Link 122 is called an "active" link, while link 124 is a "stand-by" link. Because the same information is transmitted on both links 122, 124, the switching node 110 located at the receiving end can choose either link to receive the transmitted
10 information. For example, if the active link 122 fails, the stand-by link 124 can deliver the same information to the switching node. This APS configuration can be implemented, for example, with the SONET/SDH standards, and can also be used to transport data packets instead of voice communications.

Although the APS system addresses link failures and can switch to a
15 redundant link within 250 milliseconds, it cannot solve a network failure across multiple nodes, unless the network is covered with the APS system, which could be very expensive. Also, although the APS system increases the reliability of packet networks, the duplicated data sent on both links 122, 124 reduces the bandwidth in half, resulting in a waste of bandwidth.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

A system and method for automated switching of data traffic in a network are described. Data is transmitted along a first virtual circuit among multiple virtual circuits in the network. Next, a failure is detected on the first
5 virtual circuit. As a result, transmission of data is switched from the first virtual circuit to a second virtual circuit among the multiple virtual circuits in the network.

Other features and advantages of the present invention will be apparent from the accompanying drawings and from the detailed description that
10 follows.

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BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The present invention is illustrated by way of example and not limitation in the figures of the accompanying drawings, in which like references indicate similar elements and in which:

5 **Figure 1a** shows an exemplary connection-oriented network.

Figure 1b shows an exemplary connection-oriented network with an example of an Automatic Protection Switching (APS) system.

Figure 2 shows an exemplary packet network for handling voice communications.

10 **Figure 3** shows one embodiment of the system for automated switching of data traffic.

Figure 4 is a flow diagram representing detection of a failure in the system for automated switching of data traffic.

15 **Figure 5** is a flow diagram representing detection of a remedied failure in the system for automated switching of data traffic.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

According to embodiments described herein, a gateway module within an ATM switch transmits data along a first virtual circuit among multiple virtual circuits in a packet network. Next, a line card within the gateway

5 module detects a failure on the first virtual circuit. As a result, the line card switches transmission of data from the first virtual circuit to a second virtual circuit among the multiple virtual circuits in the network, thereby increasing the reliability of the network. One intended advantage is the reduction of the network failure time and the associated traffic loss. Another intended

10 advantage is the implementation of the redundancy in the ATM layer of the network, which contains the ATM switch, without any involvement from the Internet Protocol (IP) layer, which contains routers receiving data.

Figure 2 shows an exemplary connection-oriented network for handling voice communications, such as voice calls. As shown in Figure 2, in one

15 embodiment, an end user 210, trying to initiate a voice call directed to a second end user 250, transmits a sequence of bits along link 215 to a network 200 via a transmitting first gateway module 220. The transmitting gateway module 220 includes a line card 225 connected to the network. In one embodiment, line card 225 is a Voice Interworking Service Module (VISM) card, available from

20 Cisco Systems, Inc., of San Jose, California. In one embodiment, the sequence of bits is transmitted at a standard rate into gateway module 220, is received by the line card 225, and translated into packets or cells.

Referring again to Figure 2, the data packets are then sent through the network 200 and reach a receiving second gateway module 240, prior to being delivered to the second user 250. The receiving gateway module 240 also includes a line card 245 connected to the network 200. In one embodiment, line card 225 is a VISM card, available from Cisco Systems, Inc., of San Jose, California. Once received within line card 245 of gateway module 240, the packets are decoded and translated back into sequence of bits, which are then transmitted to user 250 along link 255. The system for improving reliability of the network 200 will now be described in further detail.

Figure 3 shows one embodiment of the system for automated switching of data traffic in a packet network. In one embodiment, the packet network is an Internet Protocol (IP) network. As illustrated in Figure 3, line card 225 within gateway module 220 is connected to line card 245 within gateway module 240 through routers 260 and 280 provided within network 200. In one embodiment, routers 260 and 280 are high-speed routers residing within the IP network 200. Router 260 further includes ATM interfaces 262 and 264 and router interface 266. Router 280 further includes ATM interfaces 282 and 284 and router interface 286. The router interface 266 of router 260 is further connected to the router interface 286 of router 280 through a communication link 250. In one embodiment, communication link 250 is a Packet over SONET link, having fully redundant APS protection.

Line card 225 within gateway module 220 is connected to ATM interface 262 of router 260 through a link supporting ATM virtual circuit 228. Line card 225 is further connected to ATM interface 282 of router 280 through a link supporting ATM virtual circuit 229. Line card 245 within gateway module 240 is connected to ATM interface 264 of router 260 through a link supporting ATM virtual circuit 238 and is further connected to ATM interface 284 of router 280 through a link supporting ATM virtual circuit 239. ATM virtual circuits 228, 229, 238, 239, can support multiple voice connections between gateway modules 220 and 240. Each ATM virtual circuit 228, 229, 238, 239 is provisioned with a predetermined bandwidth, sufficient to support all connections established by gateway modules 220 and 240.

In one embodiment, if a voice connection is established between gateway modules 220 and 240, line card 225 transmits data packets along virtual circuit 228 to router 260. Router 260 receives the data packets through ATM interface 262 and transmits data to line card 245 along ATM virtual circuit 238 using the ATM interface 264. At the same time, line card 245 transmits data packets along virtual circuit 238 to router 260, which routes the data packets to line card 225 along virtual circuit 228. Alternatively, line card 225 may establish a connection along virtual circuit 229, through router 280, and transmit the data packets to line card 245. In yet another embodiment, line card 225 may send data packets along both virtual circuits 228 and 229.

In one embodiment, at the same time with the transmission of data packets along virtual circuit 228, line card 225 transmits detecting cells, for example Operation and Management (OAM) loopback cells, at a predetermined frequency along both virtual circuits 228 and 229. Each OAM loopback cell
5 includes a special correlation tag to router with active loop back indication. As a result, virtual circuit 228 carries data packets and OAM loopback cells, while virtual circuit 229 only carries OAM loopback cells at the predetermined frequency.

Line card 225 within gateway module 220 monitors the virtual circuit 228
10 and receives the OAM loopback cells at the predetermined frequency. If a failure is declared on the link supporting virtual circuit 228, the connection which allows the flow of data packets and OAM loopback cells along virtual circuit 228 is affected and line card 225 stops receiving the OAM loopback cells at the predetermined frequency.

15 In one embodiment, if line card 225 detects a predetermined gap in the receipt of OAM loopback cells along virtual circuit 228, it declares the failure, and switches transmission of data packets along virtual circuit 229. In one embodiment, line card 225 detects a gap of three consecutive OAM loopback cells. Alternatively, another number of consecutive OAM loopback cells may
20 be provisioned to signal the failure in transmission of data.

Once data packets are switched to the connection established along virtual circuit 229, data travels to router 280 through ATM interface 282. Router

280 then routes the flow of data packets via ATM interface 284 and along virtual circuit 239 to line card 245.

Even if line card 245 now receives data packets along virtual circuit 239, line card 245 is not aware of the failure declared along virtual circuit 228 and continues to send data along virtual circuit 238 to router 260. Since router 260 receives no data along virtual circuit 228 and has detected the failure by a predetermined procedure, for example transmission of OAM loopback cells from router 260 to line card 225, it cannot send data along virtual circuit 228.

As a result, router 260 forwards the data packets received from line card 245 to router 280 along IP link 250. Router 280 receives the data packets through interface 286 and routes the data packets to line card 225 along virtual circuit 229.

Figure 4 is a flow diagram representing detection of a failure in the system for automated switching of data traffic. At processing block 410, data is transmitted on a first virtual circuit in the packet network. At processing block 420, detecting cells are transmitted at a predetermined frequency on the first virtual circuit and a second virtual circuit in the packet network. In one embodiment, the detecting cells are OAM loopback cells having a correlation tag with incrementing sequence number.

At processing block 430, the detecting cells are received along the first and the second virtual circuit. At processing block 440, a decision is made

whether a predetermined gap is detected in receipt of the detecting cells. In one embodiment, the predetermined gap contains three consecutive detecting cells.

If the gap is detected, then, at processing block 450, data transmission is switched on to the second virtual circuit. Otherwise, if no gap is detected,

5 processing blocks 410 through 440 are repeated.

Referring back to Figure 3, after transmission of data packets is switched to virtual circuit 229, line card 225 continues to monitor virtual circuits 228 and 229 by sending OAM loopback cells at the predetermined frequency along both virtual circuits 228 and 229. Line card 225 detects that virtual circuit 228 is back
10 up and that the failure has been remedied once it receives a predetermined sequence of OAM loopback cells along virtual circuit 228. In one embodiment, the predetermined sequence contains five consecutive OAM loopback cells. Alternatively, a different number of consecutive OAM loopback cells may be provided to signal that the failure has been remedied.

15 In one embodiment, line card 225 continues to send data packets along virtual circuit 229 and OAM loopback cells along both virtual circuits 228 and 229. Alternatively, line card 225 may be provisioned to switch transmission of data packets back to virtual circuit 228.

Figure 5 is a flow diagram representing detection of a remedied failure in
20 the system for automated switching of data traffic. At processing block 510, data is transmitted on the second virtual circuit. At processing block 520, detecting cells are transmitted at a predetermined frequency on the first virtual

circuit and the second virtual circuit in the packet network. In one embodiment, the detecting cells are OAM loopback cells having the correlation tag with incrementing sequence number.

At processing block 530, the detecting cells are received along the first
5 and the second virtual circuit. At processing block 540, a decision is made whether a predetermined sequence is detected in receipt of the detecting cells. In one embodiment, the predetermined sequence contains five consecutive detecting cells.

If the sequence is detected, then, at processing block 550, in one
10 embodiment, data transmission is maintained on the second virtual circuit. Alternatively, data transmission may be switched to the first virtual circuit. If no sequence is detected, processing blocks 510 through 540 are repeated.

In one embodiment, the following discussion is presented in the context of a Voice over packet network, such as an Internet Protocol (IP) network.
15 However, the present invention is not limited to IP networks and may be implemented with other types of networks, such as Frame Relay networks running on Asynchronous Transfer Mode (ATM) networks, and any protocol which can run over an ATM network. The present invention may be implemented with different types of communication paths or virtual circuits,
20 such as Permanent Virtual Circuits (PVCs), Switched Virtual Circuits (SVCs), or a combination of PVCs and SVCs.

It is also to be understood that embodiments of this invention may be used as or to support software programs executed upon some form of processing core (such as the CPU of a computer) or otherwise implemented or realized upon or within a machine readable medium. A machine readable
5 medium includes any mechanism for storing or transmitting information in a form readable by a machine (e.g., a computer). For example, a machine readable medium includes read-only memory (ROM); random access memory (RAM); magnetic disk storage media; optical storage media; flash memory devices; electrical, optical, acoustical or other form of propagated signals (e.g.,
10 carrier waves, infrared signals, digital signals, etc.); or any other type of media suitable for storing or transmitting information.

In the foregoing specification, the invention has been described with reference to specific exemplary embodiments thereof. It will, however, be evident that various modifications and changes may be made thereto without
15 departing from the broader spirit and scope of the invention as set forth in the appended claims. The specification and drawings are, accordingly, to be regarded in an illustrative rather than a restrictive sense.